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Attitudes toward Lesbians, Gay Men, and Their Rights in a Sample of Ecuadorian Cisgender Men and Women

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ABSTRACT

Since 1997, Ecuador has undergone a series of changes to ensure family rights to sexual minorities. However, there is still limited research regarding attitudes toward them. This study focused on the attitudes toward lesbians (L), gay men (G), and their rights. A sample of 318 cisgender Ecuadorians who responded to an online survey was recruited. Analyses indicated that men, heterosexuals, who practice their religion, attend more frequently to religious services, and identify as conservative showed higher levels of prejudice against LG as well as less support toward their rights. Further, participants who did not have LG acquaintances, friends, family members, and those who did not know any LG parented family showed less support toward these populations. Multiple regression analyses indicated that believing that a person's sexual orientation is learned significantly predicted the attitudes measured in our study. Implications of these findings to help reduce prejudice against LG individuals are discussed.

KEYWORDS

Homosexuality; sexual stigma; sexual prejudice; attitudes; gay and lesbian rights; etiology; homonegativity

Introduction

In recent years, Latin America has become the scenario of several social and legal transformations to create safe and discrimination-free environments for sexual and gender minority populations (Navarro, Barrientos, Gómez, & Bahamondes, 2019). Currently, no country in the region criminalizes same-sex sexual behaviors, and most of them have issued anti-discrimination laws (Barrientos, 2016). Argentina, Brazil, and Colombia, among other countries, have also approved same-sex marriage and adoption. This increasing recognition of sexual and gender minority rights has allowed these populations to become more visible and empowered (Barrientos, 2016). However, hate crimes and discriminatory practices based on sexual orientation and gender

identity persist in contexts such as schools, universities, workplaces, and public spaces (Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, 2015).

To date, there is limited information on the attitudes toward lesbians, gay men, and their rights¹ in Ecuador, a country with a population size of approximately 17.4 million inhabitants (INEC, 2020). Over the last two decades, this historically conservative and religious country has taken significant steps to promote equality. In late 1997, the Constitutional Court declared same-sex sexual behavior as no longer illegal nor punishable by incarceration (Tribunal Constitucional de la República del Ecuador, 1997). A decade later, in 2008, the new Ecuadorian Constitution recognized the principles of equality and nondiscrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The 2008 Constitution also adopted a broader definition of family and marriage, recognizing family diversity and stating that marriage is the product of a voluntary union between two people, without explicitly specifying that it should be between a man and a woman (República de Ecuador, 2008). This change allowed 385 same-sex couples to formalize their unions between 2014 and 2017 (El Telégrafo, 2017).

More recently, in June 2019, the Ecuadorian Constitutional Court ruled in favor of same-sex marriage following the Inter-American Court of Human Rights mandate supporting marriage equality and nondiscrimination (Corte Constitucional del Ecuador, 2019). As in many other countries, this decision unleashed a series of riots led by conservative and faith-based groups that perceived the Constitutional Court's ruling as an imposition made by liberal groups that wanted to promote the so-called *gender ideology* agenda (El Universo, 2019). The high support toward these riots made clear the strong negativity against sexual minorities, and their rights. Data from the latest Americas Barometer suggests that 51.3% of the country's population disagrees with same-sex marriage and 36.4% disagrees with gay and lesbians occupying public charges (Moncagatta, Moscoso Moreno, Pachano, Montalvo, & Sechmeister, 2020).

To learn more about the nature of the attitudes toward lesbians, gay men, and their rights in the country, we conducted a study with an Ecuadorian sample who responded to an online questionnaire. We compared attitudes based on several sociodemographic characteristics, interpersonal contact variables, and etiological beliefs of sexual orientation. We also tested which variables predicted attitudes toward gay men, lesbians, and their rights.

Research on attitudes toward lesbians, gay men, and lesbian and gay rights

The study of attitudes toward lesbians, gay men, and their rights has significantly grown over the past 25–30 years. Traditionally, studies in this field have used explicit, self-report measures to assess what people think of same-sex sexual behavior, stereotypes about these populations, and beliefs regarding

their rights—e.g., having jobs, marrying, and adopting children—(Steffens, 2005). Contemporary research has also recognized the importance of studying the attitudes toward lesbians, gay men, and other minority populations (e.g. bisexual and transgender persons) separately from their rights since “individuals can hold very negative stereotypes [. . .] but also believe that they deserve the same rights and protections as anyone else” (Horn, 2013, p. 240).

Research in this area has examined trend changes in attitudes over time and across contexts (Gerhards, 2010; Kelley, 2001; Smith, 2011). Overall, studies indicate a progressive increase in the acceptance of lesbians and gay men in many parts of the world, especially among younger cohorts (Flores, 2019; Kite, Trogans, & Schultz, 2019; Smith, 2011). Research in Latin America has shown similar patterns. Over the last decade, this region has experienced some of the fastest changes regarding the advancement of sexual minority rights, including gender identity laws, anti-discrimination statutes, and the recognition of family rights such as same-sex marriage and adoption (Barrientos, 2016; Chaux, León, Cuellar, & Martínez, 2021). However, as Chaux et al. (2021) note, progress has been highly uneven across countries. Studies have found that the most accepting countries are Uruguay, Argentina, Chile, and Brazil, whereas Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, and Paraguay are the least accepting.

To better understand public attitudes, studies have analyzed the impact of different demographic, psychological, and social variables associated with levels of support and prejudice toward these populations (Brown & Henriquez, 2008; Horn, 2013; Schulte & Battle, 2004). Sociodemographic variables such as gender, age, ethnicity, education level, and religion are some of the most consistent predictors across studies (Horn, 2013). In general, women tend to be less prejudiced than men (Herek, 1988, 2002; Kerns & Fine, 1994). Cisgender heterosexual men are particularly negative toward gay men, and heterosexual women tend to have similar attitudes toward lesbians and gay men (Herek & Gonzalez-Rivera, 2006; Roggemans, Spruyt, Van Droogenbroeck, & Keppens, 2015). To explain these findings, studies have used Social Role Theory (Lim, 2002) and Connell’s concept of Hegemonic Masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). According to these theoretical frameworks, heterosexual men tend to reject male homosexuality because being gay is usually associated with being feminine, a characteristic that is highly degraded in many societies (Kerns & Fine, 1994; Oliver & Hyde, 1993). Thus, gay men are perceived as transgressors of gender norms that prescribe heterosexuality as the only natural and valuable sexual orientation. High levels of internalized stigma due to rigid gender norms may also explain why certain individuals from sexual minorities express low levels of support toward minority rights including same-sex marriage and adoption.

Another relevant variable is age. Younger people have more positive attitudes toward lesbians and gay men compared to older adults (Horn, 2013). These differences can be explained by cohort effects that suggest an evolution

in social attitudes over time (Smith, 2011). Education level may also play a role in predicting acceptance toward lesbians and gay men. College-educated adults tend to show less prejudiced attitudes toward lesbians and gay men (Ohlander, Batalova, & Treas, 2005). Higher schooling may promote acceptance by developing cognitive abilities to question culturally taught ideas of intolerance against minorities (Ohlander et al., 2005).

Religious affiliation is another variable associated with negative attitudes toward lesbians and gay men (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009; Roggemans et al., 2015; Schulte & Battle, 2004). Some studies have found that Muslims tend to be more negative against lesbians and gay men than Catholics and Protestants (Finke & Adamczyk, 2008); conversely, Buddhists and Atheists hold more positive attitudes (Jäckle & Wenzelburger, 2015). Other studies have found that religiosity might be more relevant than religious affiliation. People more actively involved in their religion express more prejudice against lesbians and gay men (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009; Scheitle & Adamczyk, 2009).

Finally, research has identified that people who have close lesbian or gay friends tend to express higher support toward lesbians, gay men, and their rights (Cunningham & Melton, 2012). According to Allport's contact hypothesis, individuals who have contact with people from groups aside from their own tend to show positive attitudes toward them, depending on variables such as the characteristics of the relationship and the frequency of contact (Costa, Pereira, & Leal, 2015; Lemm, 2006). Thus, knowing lesbians and gay men increases the chances of reducing prejudiced views on homosexuality. Etiology beliefs of sexual orientation, that is, people's attributions of the origin of a person's sexual orientation, can also affect the levels of prejudice toward lesbians and gay men (Costa & Salinas-Quiroz, 2019; Frias-Navarro, Monterde-i-Bort, Pascual-Soler, & Badenes-Ribera, 2015). Believing homosexuality is a matter of choice or learning (i.e., learned etiology), instead of a biological phenomenon (i.e., genetic etiology), is associated with higher prejudice (Whitley, 2009).

The current study

Since 1997, Ecuador has made significant advancements to create a legal platform that provides gay men, lesbians, and other sexual and gender minorities better-living conditions. However, there are still several obstacles that allow policies to trickle down, be supported, and be enacted. Data from a nationwide survey published in 2013 reveals that gay men, lesbians, and other sexual minorities in the country face high levels of discrimination, exclusion, and violence, especially in family contexts and public spaces (INEC, 2013). It is possible that negative attitudes are behind some, if not most, of the episodes of violence against these populations.

As far as we know, there is limited information about the attitudes toward lesbians, gay men, and their rights in the country, and much fewer data collected after the Constitutional Court's 2019 decision on same-sex marriage. Previous research has suggested that social attitudes tend to change after legal resolutions (Takács & Szalma, 2011), thus, studying attitudes toward these populations and their rights after the Court's decision could help create a baseline from which it is possible to start measuring changes over time. This information could also help identify target populations and variables to tackle when designing psychosocial interventions.

This study aimed to describe the attitudes toward lesbians, gay men, and their rights in an Ecuadorian sample. We sought to compare the attitudes based on sociodemographic characteristics such as gender, age, sexual orientation, education level, marital status, parenting status, religious affiliation, religious practicing, frequency of attendance to religious services, and political orientation. In addition, we sought to compare the attitudes based on interpersonal contact variables (i.e., having a lesbian or gay acquaintance, friends, family members, knowing a lesbian or gay parented family) and etiology beliefs of sexual orientation. Finally, we tested which variables predict attitudes toward lesbians, gay men, and their rights. Based on the literature review, we expected to find higher levels of prejudice among those who are male, older, heterosexual, less-educated, those who report practicing their religion, those who report frequently attending religious services, and those who identify politically as conservative (i.e., right-wing). We also expected to identify higher levels of prejudice among those with fewer contact with lesbians and gay men, and those who believe sexual orientation is a socially learned characteristic. We did not have any hypotheses based on marital status and parenting status. We also did not have hypotheses regarding which variables would predict the attitudes in our sample.

Methods

Design and procedures

This study was part of an international research initiative whose aim was to describe the attitudes toward lesbians, gay men, same-sex parenting and sexual minority rights among people living in Latin America, The Caribbean, and Europe. The international study used a cross-sectional design. Data was collected between May and October 2019 through an online survey available in Qualtrics, a digital survey distribution platform. In Ecuador, the survey was administered in Spanish, the country's official language. To recruit participants, the first two authors distributed the survey link through their personal social networks (Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter), and college

mailing lists. The first two authors also published the survey link on the official Facebook account of their research group.

To participate, those interested in taking part of the study had to read and accept the consent form, displayed electronically on the first page of the survey. The informed consent described the study's objectives and conditions as well as participants' rights and contact information in case of any doubts. Participation was voluntary, anonymous, and people could withdraw at any point of the study. The corresponding author received IRB approval before launching the survey internationally. In Ecuador, the study protocol was reviewed and approved by the first authors' university.

Participants

To take part of the international study, participants had to be at least 18 years old, be a Portuguese or Spanish speaker, and live in one of the countries where the international study was taking place. Four hundred seven ($n = 407$) adults born in Ecuador responded to the survey. In the initial sample, 270 participants (66.3%) reported being biological females and 137 biological males (33.7%). Regarding their gender, 228 participants identified themselves as female (64.2%), 118 as male (33.2%), 9 as other (2.5%) and 52 did not respond to the question. A gender identity variable was then created based on biological sex and self-identified gender. Participants indicating concordance between biological sex and self-identified gender were coded as cisgender, those who indicated discordance were coded as transgender, and those who identified their gender as other were coded as such. Based on this categorization, most participants were identified as cisgender ($n = 344$, 84.5%), 3 were transgender (0.7%), 8 as having other gender identity (2.0%), and 52 participants did not report on their gender identity (12.8%). Because of the unbalanced numbers on this variable, we decided to restrict our sample only to cisgender participants. In addition, 92.6% ($n = 377$) reported living in Ecuador at the time of the study, 6.9% reported living in another country ($n = 28$) and 0.4% did not answer the question ($n = 2$). Based on this data, we decided to include in our final sample only those participants living in Ecuador. Thus, a sample of 318 participants were taken into consideration in the final analyses.

Measures

The instruments used in this study were originally developed in English. To ensure conceptual equivalence, each instrument was forward- and back-translated in Spanish and Portuguese by bilingual professionals who were familiar with the topics of the study. The final instrument included the following components:

Sociodemographic questionnaire

The first section of the survey included questions to assess participants' age, biological sex, self-identified gender, sexual orientation, education level, marital status and parenting status, religious affiliation, religious practicing, frequency of attendance to religious services, and political orientation.

Attitudes toward lesbian and gay men scale

We used the Attitudes toward Lesbian and Gay Men (ATLG) scale, originally developed by Herek (1998). This instrument consists of 20 items that measure attitudes toward gay men (AGM; 10 items) and attitudes toward lesbians (AL; 10 items). Each item uses a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree. In this study, we used 8 items on each subscale. We averaged the scores of the 16 items used in this study to obtain a composite measure that reflected participants' attitudes toward gay men and lesbians. Higher scores indicated higher prejudice against these populations. The psychometric properties of the ATLG were excellent. Cronbach alpha of the attitudes toward gay men and lesbians was 0.98. The subscales' coefficients were also excellent ($\alpha_{AGM} = 0.98$; $\alpha_{AL} = 0.97$).

Attitudes toward gay and lesbian rights scale

This scale was originally developed by Costa et al. (2014) and consists of eight items that measure attitudes regarding the rights of gay men and lesbians and the recognition of same-sex relationships (e.g., "I think it is ok that gay men and lesbians fight for their rights in society," "Same-sex marriage should not be allowed"). Items were measured in a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree. In this study, Cronbach alpha was 0.91.

Etiology beliefs of homosexuality

This instrument was developed by Frías-Navarro (2009) and consists of eight items that address common beliefs and assumptions about the developmental origins of homosexuality. It has two subscales: Genetic etiology and Learned etiology. Genetic etiology is assessed by four items (e.g., "The homosexual sexual orientation is an inevitable behavior that depends on genetics") and the Learned etiology scale is also comprised of four items (e.g., "A child who is raised by same-sex parents will have a greater probability of having a homosexual sexual preference"). This instrument uses a Likert-type response scale ranging from 1 = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree. The higher the score of each subscale, stronger beliefs about the genetic or learned etiology of homosexual orientation. In this study, the Cronbach alpha of each subscale was 0.84 for genetic etiology and 0.89 for learned etiology.

Interpersonal contact with gay men and lesbians

The instrument also included four questions to assess whether people had any lesbian or gay acquaintances, friends, family members or knew any lesbian or gay parented families. These questions had a dichotomous yes or no format.

Data analysis

Descriptive and inferential analyses were conducted using SPSS version 25 (IBM Corp. Inc, 2017). We obtained descriptive statistics on the attitudes toward lesbian and gay men, as well as the attitudes toward lesbian and gay rights.

We also conducted independent sample t-tests and one-way ANOVAs using Bonferroni post-hoc comparisons to identify group differences in the attitude scores. The following sociodemographic categorical variables were used: self-identified gender (male, female), sexual orientation (heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, other), highest education level (high school, undergraduate school, postgraduate school), marital status (single, married, civil union, divorced), parenting status (have children, do not have children), having a religion (yes/no), religious affiliation (Christian, Catholic, Spiritual but not religious, agnostic/atheist, other), religious practicing (yes/no), frequency of attendance to religious services (several times a week, at least once a week, once or twice a month, once or twice a year, only on holidays), and political ideology (liberal, moderate, conservative). We also conducted independent sample t-tests based on interpersonal contact variables: having a lesbian or gay acquaintance (yes/no), friend (yes/no), family member (yes/no), or knowing a lesbian or gay parented family (yes/no). Pearson correlation analyses were also carried out using the scores of each attitude scale and the following interval/ratio-level variables: age, genetic etiology, and learned etiology.

Finally, we conducted multiple regression analyses using attitudes toward lesbians and gay men, and lesbian and gay rights as outcome variables. Predictors included dichotomized versions of the categorical variables and interval/ratio-level variables. The variables included in the model were age, self-identified gender (male, female), sexual orientation (heterosexual, LGB+), education level (high school education, college education), marital status (single, other), parenting status (yes/no), religious affiliation (Christian/Catholic, other), religious practicing (yes/no), frequency of attendance of religious services (weekly, other), political affiliation (conservative, other), having a lesbian or gay acquaintance (yes/no), friend (yes/no), family member (yes/no), knowing a lesbian or gay parented family (yes/no), learned etiology, and genetic etiology. Homoscedasticity and collinearity were investigated before conducting the analyses.

Results

Participants

The final sample comprised 213 (67.0%) cisgender females and 105 (33.0%) cisgender males. Age ranged from 18 to 70 years, with a mean age of 28.8 years ($SD = 11.61$). Regarding sexual orientation, 64.8% participants identified themselves as heterosexual ($n = 206$), 11.0% as gay ($n = 35$), 5.7% as lesbian ($n = 18$), 17.0% as bisexual ($n = 54$), and 1.6% as having other sexual orientation ($n = 5$). Those who selected this last option, identified themselves as queer, pansexual or responded not identifying with a particular sexual orientation. [Table 1](#) provides a further description of the sample.

In terms of the highest educational level achieved, 36.2% reported having completed high school ($n = 115$), 38.7% completed college/undergraduate school ($n = 123$), and 25.2% completed postgraduate school ($n = 80$). Most participants (73.0%) were single at the time of the study ($n = 232$), 15.7% were married ($n = 50$), 4.7% were on civil unions ($n = 15$), and 6.6% were divorced ($n = 21$). At the time of the study, 20.8% of the participants reported having children ($n = 66$).

Around three quarters of the sample ($n = 245$, 77.0%) reported having a religion. The majority identified as Catholic ($n = 131$, 41.2%). Approximately half of the participants reported actively practicing their religion ($n = 84$, 49.7%). Thirty two participants ($n = 32$, 38.1%) reported attending religious services at least once a week and 22 participants (26.2%) reported attending religious services at least once or twice a month. Finally, in terms of their political ideology, most of participants self-identified as moderate ($n = 95$, 47.3%), 18.4% as conservative ($n = 40$) and 14.4% as liberal; 19.9% reported not knowing their political ideology ($n = 40$) and 36.8% did not answer the question ($n = 117$).

Attitudes toward lesbians and gay men

First, we present descriptive information and report the comparison analyses based on sociodemographic and interpersonal contact variables. [Table 1](#) shows the mean scores of the attitudes toward lesbians and gay men according to each of the analyzed variables. We also present results from the correlation analyses using age and etiological beliefs. Finally, we present the results from the multiple regression model predicting attitudes toward gay men.

The mean score of the ATLG scale was 1.54 ($SD = .911$). The minimum score was 1, and the maximum score was 4.63. Analyses using a two-sample t test indicated gender differences on attitudes toward lesbians and gay men, $t(256) = 2.252$, $p = .025$. Results indicated that men ($n = 88$, $M = 1.70$, $SD = .929$) were more prejudiced toward lesbians and gay men than women ($n = 170$, $M = 1.46$, $SD = .794$).

Table 1. Mean scores of the attitudes toward lesbians and gay men scale and the attitudes toward lesbian and gay rights.

	N	%	Attitudes toward lesbians and gay men		Attitudes toward lesbian and gay rights	
			<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Gender						
Men	105	33.0	1.71*	0.93	2.06	0.90
Women	213	67.0	1.46	0.79	1.91	0.88
Other	0	0.0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Sexual orientation						
Heterosexual	206	64.8	1.80**	0.96	2.27**	0.94
Gay	35	11.0	1.14	0.37	1.41	0.30
Lesbian	18	5.7	1.02	0.07	1.31	0.44
Bisexual	54	17.0	1.08	0.18	1.46	0.42
Other	5	1.6	1.36	0.74	1.60	0.86
Education level						
High school education	115	36.2	1.36	0.72	1.79	0.81
Undergraduate education	123	38.7	1.57	0.85	2.01	0.87
Postgraduate education	80	25.2	1.79**	0.97	2.15*	0.98
Marital status						
Single	232	73.0	1.45	0.79	1.83	0.81
Married	50	15.7	1.97**	1.00	2.54**	1.03
Civil union	15	4.7	1.37	0.79	1.69	0.68
Divorced	21	6.6	1.88	0.87	2.30	0.86
Parenting status						
Yes	66	20.8	1.98**	0.98	2.55**	0.96
No	252	79.2	1.44	0.78	1.81	0.80
Religious affiliation						
Christian	23	7.2	2.16**	1.13	2.64**	1.01
Catholic	131	41.2	1.88	0.98	2.39	0.92
Spiritual but not religious	76	23.9	1.27	0.60	1.60	0.66
Agnostic/Atheist	73	23.0	1.15	0.35	1.49	0.50
Other	15	4.7	1.48	0.72	1.78	0.74
Practicing religion						
Yes	84	49.7	2.16**	1.06	2.62**	0.98
No	85	50.3	1.59	0.83	2.11	0.82
Frequency of attendance to religious services						
Several times a week	11	13.1	3.15*	0.99	3.48*	0.60
At least once a week	32	38.1	1.98	0.93	2.47	0.91
Once or twice a month	22	26.2	1.97	1.06	2.46	1.01
Once or twice a year	11	13.1	1.98	1.09	2.59	1.05
Only on holidays/special occasions	8	9.5	2.01	1.14	2.29	1.17
Political orientation						
Liberal/left-wing	29	14.4	1.49	0.99	1.89	0.93
Moderate/center	95	47.3	1.60	0.89	1.89	0.89
Conservative/right-wing	37	18.4	1.76*	1.06	2.31*	1.07
Does not know	40	19.9	1.13	0.30	1.63	0.54
Having a lesbian or gay acquaintance						
Yes	276	96.5	1.51	0.81	1.93	0.86
No	10	3.5	2.65**	1.23	2.90**	1.02
Having a lesbian or gay friend						
Yes	237	82.9	1.40	0.70	1.84	0.81
No	49	17.1	2.33**	1.13	2.57**	0.99
Having a lesbian or gay family member						
Yes	106	37.1	1.31	0.62	1.75	0.75
No	180	62.9	1.68**	0.93	2.08**	0.93
Knowing a lesbian or gay parented family						
Yes	74	26.0	1.18	0.36	1.63	0.56
No	211	74.0	1.68**	0.94	2.09**	0.95
Total	318	100.0	1.55	0.85	1.96	0.89

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Regarding sexual orientation, a one-way ANOVA indicated significant differences between groups, $F(4, 253) = 12.017$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2_p = .160$. Post hoc comparisons using Bonferroni analysis indicated heterosexuals ($n = 163$, $M = 1.80$, $SD = .956$) were more prejudiced than those who self-identified as gay ($n = 31$, $M = 1.13$, $SD = .374$), lesbian ($n = 16$, $M = 1.02$, $SD = .068$), and bisexual ($n = 43$, $M = 1.08$, $SD = .176$). There were no significant differences between heterosexuals and those who identified their sexual orientation as other ($n = 5$, $M = 1.36$, $SD = .742$). Bonferroni analyses did not suggest differences among gays, lesbians, bisexuals and those with other sexual orientations.

A one-way ANOVA using education level as the comparison variable, indicated statistically significant differences among groups, $F(2, 255) = 5.084$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2_p = .038$. Bonferroni analysis indicated that people with postgraduate education ($n = 65$, $M = 1.79$, $SD = .967$) had the highest levels of prejudice against lesbians and gay men when compared to those with undergraduate studies ($n = 96$, $M = 1.56$, $SD = .853$) and those who completed high school ($n = 97$, $M = 1.36$, $SD = .715$). There were no significant differences between people with undergraduate studies and individuals with high school studies.

A one-way ANOVA comparing attitudes toward lesbians and gay men based on marital status also suggested statistically significant differences, $F(3, 254) = 5.101$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2_p = .057$. Bonferroni post-hoc comparisons indicated that married people ($n = 38$, $M = 1.96$, $SD = 1.00$) had higher levels of prejudice toward lesbians and gay men than those who were single. No significant differences were detected between divorced ($n = 15$, $M = 1.88$, $SD = .871$), single ($n = 194$, $M = 1.45$, $SD = .792$), and those in civil unions ($n = 11$, $M = 1.36$, $SD = .792$). Furthermore, a two-sample t-test comparing the attitudes toward lesbians and gay men based on parenting status indicated significant differences, $t(256) = 4.071$, $p < .01$. Participants who reported having children ($n = 49$, $M = 1.98$, $SD = .984$) had more negative attitudes toward lesbians and gay men than those without children ($n = 209$, $M = 1.44$, $SD = .783$).

Regarding religious affiliation, a one-way ANOVA indicated significant differences between groups, $F(4, 253) = 13.705$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2_p = .178$. Bonferroni post-hoc comparisons showed that Christians ($n = 20$, $M = 2.16$, $SD = 1.12$) and Catholics ($n = 95$, $M = 1.88$, $SD = .984$) were the most prejudiced groups against lesbians and gay men compared to those who reported being spiritual but not religious ($n = 67$, $M = 1.27$, $SD = .597$), individuals who reported being atheist/agnostic ($n = 63$, $M = 1.15$, $SD = .347$), and those who reported having other religion ($n = 13$, $M = 1.46$, $SD = .717$). No significant differences were detected between Christians and Catholics regarding their attitudes toward gay men. Furthermore, a two-sample t-test indicated significant differences based on religious practicing,

$t(126) = 3.386, p < .01$. The analyses showed that those who reported practicing their religion ($n = 65, M = 2.16, SD = 1.06$) had more negative attitudes toward lesbians and gay men than those who do not practice their religion ($n = 63, M = 1.59, SD = .826$).

A one-way ANOVA comparing attitudes according to the frequency of attendance to religious services also indicated significant differences, $F(4, 60) = 2.836, p = .032, \eta^2_p = .159$. Bonferroni post-hoc comparisons showed that those who attend to religious services several times a week ($n = 10, M = 3.15, SD = .990$) had more prejudiced attitudes toward gay men than those who attend at least once a week ($n = 27, M = 1.98, SD = .934$), once or twice a month ($n = 14, M = 1.97, SD = 1.06$), once or twice a year ($n = 8, M = 1.98, SD = 1.09$), and those who attend religious services only on holidays ($n = 6, M = 2.01, SD = 1.14$).

Regarding political affiliation, a one-way ANOVA indicated group differences, $F(3, 157) = 3.176, p = .026, \eta^2_p = .057$. Bonferroni post hoc comparisons showed that conservatives ($n = 31, M = 1.76, SD = 1.06$) had higher prejudice against lesbians and gay men than those who do not know their political orientation ($n = 31, M = 1.13, SD = .296$). No differences were found between conservatives, moderates ($n = 80, M = 1.60, SD = .888$), and liberals ($n = 19, M = 1.49, SD = .989$).

We conducted two-sample *t*-tests based on interpersonal contact variables. Results indicate that people who do not have a lesbian or gay acquaintance ($n = 9, M = 2.65, SD = 1.23$) have more prejudiced views on lesbians and gay men than those who do ($n = 249, M = 1.51, SD = .808$), $t(256) = 4.075, p < .01$. Participants who do not have a close lesbian or gay friend ($n = 41, M = 2.33, SD = 1.13$) have also more prejudiced attitudes toward lesbian gay men than those who do ($n = 217, M = 1.40, SD = .695$), $t(256) = 7.041, p < .01$. Individuals who do not have lesbian or gay family members ($n = 163, M = 1.68, SD = .934$) also have less favorable attitudes toward lesbians and gay men than those whose do ($n = 95, M = 1.31, SD = .615$), $t(256) = 3.522, p < .01$. Finally, participants who did not report knowing a gay or lesbian parented family ($n = 181, M = 1.68, SD = .938$) had more prejudiced attitudes toward lesbians and gay men than those who do ($n = 71, M = 1.18, SD = .359$), $t(256) = 4.344, p < .01$.

We ran correlation analyses between age and attitudes toward lesbians and gay men. Results indicated a positive significant correlation ($r = .288, p < .01, n = 255$). As age increases, attitudes toward lesbians and gay men become more prejudiced.

Correlation analyses based on etiological beliefs about sexual orientation were also tested. Results indicated a significant negative relationship between genetic etiological beliefs and attitudes toward lesbians and gay men ($r = -.294, p < .01, n = 258$). Stronger beliefs that sexual orientation have biological origins are related to less prejudiced attitudes toward lesbians and

gay men. The contrary occurs with learned etiological beliefs. In this case, a significant positive relationship between learned etiological beliefs and attitudes toward lesbians and gay men was detected ($r = .694$, $p < .01$, $n = 258$). Believing that sexual orientation is learned is related to stronger prejudice against lesbians and gay men.

We ran a multiple regression model to test which of the measured variables predicted the attitudes toward lesbians and gay men scores. Results indicated a significant model, $F(1, 42) = 48.149$, $p < .01$ that explained 52.3% of the variance. Learned etiological beliefs ($\beta = .731$, $p < .01$) were the only significant predictors of the model. Believing that sexual orientation is a learned characteristic predicts higher levels of prejudice against lesbians and gay men.

Attitudes toward lesbian and gay rights

Table 1 also presents the mean scores ($M = 1.96$) of the attitude toward lesbian and gay right scale ($SD = .885$). The minimum score was 1, and the maximum score was 4.50. Analyses using a two-sample t test did not indicate gender differences on attitudes toward lesbian and gay rights, $t(277) = 1.343$, $p = .180$. Results indicated no differences between men ($n = 94$, $M = 2.06$, $SD = .895$) and women ($n = 185$, $M = 1.91$, $SD = .878$).

Regarding sexual orientation, a one-way ANOVA showed significant differences between groups, $F(4, 274) = 18.387$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2_p = .212$. Post hoc comparisons using Bonferroni analysis indicated that heterosexuals ($n = 178$, $M = 2.27$, $SD = .935$) were less supportive of lesbian and gay rights than those who self-identified as gay ($n = 33$, $M = 1.41$, $SD = .301$), lesbian ($n = 16$, $M = 1.32$, $SD = .438$), and bisexual ($n = 47$, $M = 1.45$, $SD = .420$). No significant differences were detected between heterosexuals and those who identified their sexual orientation as other ($n = 5$, $M = 1.60$, $SD = .858$). Bonferroni analyses did not suggest differences among gays, lesbians, bisexuals and those with other sexual orientations.

A one-way ANOVA using highest education level as the comparison variable, indicated statistically significant differences among groups, $F(2, 276) = 3.899$, $p = .021$, $\eta^2_p = .027$. Bonferroni analysis showed that people with postgraduate education ($n = 73$, $M = 2.15$, $SD = .979$) were less supportive of lesbian and gay rights than participants with undergraduate studies ($n = 102$, $M = 2.01$, $SD = .867$) and those who completed high school ($n = 104$, $M = 1.79$, $SD = .805$). There were no significant differences between those with undergraduate studies and those with high school studies.

A one-way ANOVA comparing attitudes toward lesbian and gay rights based on marital status also suggested statistically significant differences, $F(3, 275) = 10.102$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2_p = .099$. Bonferroni post-hoc comparisons showed that married people ($n = 45$, $M = 2.54$, $SD = 1.03$) were less supportive of lesbian and gay rights when compared to single individuals. No significant

differences were detected between divorced ($n = 16$, $M = 2.31$, $SD = .861$), single ($n = 206$, $M = 1.82$, $SD = .807$), and those in civil unions ($n = 12$, $M = 1.68$, $SD = .677$). A two sample t-test comparing the attitudes based on parenting status showed significant differences, $t(277) = 5.917$, $p < .01$. Participants who reported having children ($n = 57$, $M = 2.55$, $SD = .957$) were less supportive of lesbian and gay rights than those without children ($n = 222$, $M = 1.81$, $SD = .801$).

A one-way ANOVA to compare attitudes based on religious affiliation indicated significant differences between groups, $F(4, 274) = 22.387$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2_p = .246$. Bonferroni post-hoc comparisons showed that Christians ($n = 21$, $M = 2.64$, $SD = 1.00$) and Catholics ($n = 107$, $M = 2.39$, $SD = .923$) were less supportive toward lesbian and gay rights compared to those who reported being spiritual but not religious ($n = 71$, $M = 1.60$, $SD = .655$), and participants who reported being atheist/agnostic ($n = 66$, $M = 1.49$, $SD = .500$). No significant differences were detected between Christians, Catholics and individuals who reported having other religion ($n = 14$, $M = 1.49$, $SD = .737$). Furthermore, a two-sample t-test indicated significant differences based on religious practicing, $t(140) = 3.357$, $p < .01$. The analyses showed that those who practiced their religion ($n = 71$, $M = 2.62$, $SD = .984$) were less supportive toward lesbian and gay rights than those who do not practice it ($n = 71$, $M = 2.11$, $SD = .820$).

A one-way ANOVA comparing attitudes according to the frequency of attendance to religious services also indicated significant differences, $F(4, 66) = 2.815$, $p = .032$, $\eta^2_p = .146$. Bonferroni post-hoc comparisons showed that those who attend to religious services several times a week ($n = 11$, $M = 3.47$, $SD = .601$) were less supportive of lesbian and gay rights than individuals who attend at least once a week ($n = 28$, $M = 2.47$, $SD = .908$), once or twice a month ($n = 17$, $M = 2.46$, $SD = 1.00$), once or twice a year ($n = 8$, $M = 2.59$, $SD = 1.05$), and those who attend religious services only on holidays ($n = 7$, $M = 2.29$, $SD = 1.17$).

Regarding political affiliation, a one-way ANOVA indicated group differences, $F(3, 172) = 3.492$, $p = .017$, $\eta^2_p = .057$. Bonferroni post hoc comparisons showed that conservatives ($n = 34$, $M = 2.31$, $SD = 1.07$) were less supportive toward lesbian and gay rights than those who do not know their political orientation ($n = 35$, $M = 1.63$, $SD = .538$). No differences were found between conservatives, moderates ($n = 84$, $M = 1.89$, $SD = 1.074$), and liberals ($n = 23$, $M = 1.88$, $SD = .932$).

Finally, we conducted two-sample t-tests based on interpersonal contact variables. People who do not have a lesbian or gay acquaintance ($n = 10$, $M = 2.90$, $SD = 1.01$) have less support toward lesbian and gay rights than those who do ($n = 269$, $M = 1.93$, $SD = .863$), $t(277) = 3.472$, $p < .01$. Participants who do not have a close lesbian or gay friend ($n = 48$, $M = 2.57$, $SD = .991$) have less support toward lesbian and gay rights than those who do

($n = 231$, $M = 1.84$, $SD = .808$), $t(277) = 5.454$, $p < .01$. Individuals who do not have lesbian or gay family members ($n = 177$, $M = 2.08$, $SD = .933$) have less support toward lesbian and gay rights than those who do ($n = 102$, $M = 1.75$, $SD = .753$), $t(277) = 3.042$, $p < .01$. Finally, participants who did not report knowing a gay or lesbian parented family ($n = 205$, $M = 2.08$, $SD = .948$) have less support toward lesbian and gay rights than those who do ($n = 74$, $M = 1.63$, $SD = .562$), $t(277) = 3.903$, $p < .01$.

We ran correlation analyses between attitudes toward lesbians and age. Results indicated a positive significant correlation ($r = .280$, $p < .01$, $n = 258$). As age increases, less supportive attitudes toward toward lesbian and gay rights. Correlation analyses based on etiological beliefs about sexual orientation were also tested. Results indicated a significant negative relationship between genetic etiological beliefs and attitudes toward lesbian and gay rights ($r = -.364$, $p < .01$, $n = 279$). Stronger beliefs that sexual orientation have biological origins are related to supportive attitudes toward lesbian and gay rights. A significant positive relationship between learned etiological beliefs and attitudes toward lesbians was detected ($r = .785$, $p < .01$, $n = 279$). Believing strongly that sexual orientation is learned is related to less support toward lesbian and gay rights.

Finally, we conducted a multiple regression analysis to test which of the measured variables predicted the scores of the attitudes toward lesbian and gay rights scale. Results indicated a significant model, $F(3, 45) = 49.857$, $p < .01$. The final model explained 75.3% of the variance. Significant predictors included learned etiological beliefs ($\beta = .913$, $p < .01$), marital status ($\beta = .243$, $p = .02$) and having a close lesbian or gay friend ($\beta = -.163$, $p = .045$). Believing that sexual orientation is learned, being married or having a civil status other than single, and not having a close lesbian or gay friend predict less supportive attitudes toward lesbian and gay rights.

Discussion

This study aimed to analyze the attitudes toward lesbians, gay men, and lesbian and gay rights in a sample of cisgender men and women living in Ecuador. Results from our study confirmed most of our hypotheses. We found that men, heterosexuals, those who practice their religion, those who attend more frequently to religious services, and those who identify as conservative showed higher levels of prejudice against lesbians and gay men as well as less support toward their rights. Analyses also showed that participants who did not have lesbian or gay acquaintances, friends, family members, and those who did not know any lesbian or gay parented families showed less support toward these populations. Being older and believing that a person's sexual orientation is learned were also associated with higher levels of prejudice, whereas,

believing that sexual orientation is biologically determined was associated with more favorable attitudes.

Overall, the results from our study are consistent with the literature. Previous research has found that men have higher negativity toward lesbians and gay men than women. Social Role Theory and concepts such as Connell's Hegemonic Masculinity may explain these differences (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Lim, 2002). We believe the men in our sample, especially those who are older and heterosexual, feel that male homosexuality represents a deviation from socially construed views of masculinity that privilege those who are masculine, cisgender, and heterosexual. These ideas may lead people to believe that being gay is wrong, that sexual practices between men are unnatural, and that sexual dynamics between two same-sex individuals violate culturally accepted gender norms. We believe these results may also reflect the machismo and conservatism that characterize many Latin-American countries, including Ecuador (Chaux et al., 2021; Navarro et al., 2019).

Furthermore, results from our study suggested that those who are Christian, those who actively practice their religion, and those who attend more frequently to religious services hold more prejudiced views toward lesbians, gay men, and their rights. These results are consistent with previous research (Jäckle & Wenzelburger, 2015) and can be explained by our sample's level of religiosity. In our study, half of the participants reported actively practicing their religion, and nearly 40.0% reported attending religious services at least once a week. It is possible that those who strictly live by religious standards endorse traditional views of gender roles, sexuality, and family life. Future studies should examine the relationships and interactions of religion with other variables such as marital and parenting status. Although we did not have any specific hypotheses regarding these variables, we found that those who were married and those with children have higher prejudice against lesbians and gay men. Religiosity levels may explain these observed differences (i.e., married people being more religious and conservative than singles). It is also possible that participants who marry and have children are more politically conservative. Our results suggest that conservatives tend to be more negative against lesbians, gay men, and their rights.

We also found higher levels of prejudice among those who did not have lesbian and gay acquaintances, friends, family members, and those who did not know any lesbian or gay parented families. Regression models indicated that having a lesbian or gay friend can lead to higher levels of support toward rights such as same-sex marriage and adoption. These findings support previous research indicating that people in contact with lesbians and gay men show higher favorability toward these populations (Costa et al., 2015; Costa & Salinas-Quiroz, 2019; Lemm, 2006). These results highlight the power that interpersonal contact can have to help change attitudes. Contact with lesbian

and gay people may create a sense of familiarity that, in turn, can help people question unfounded ideas about sexuality and sexual diversity.

Finally, multiple regression models indicated that the strongest predictors of attitudes toward lesbians and gay men were the etiological beliefs of sexual orientation. Believing homosexuality is learned or chosen explained more than 50% of the variance of the attitudes toward lesbians and gay men. This finding is consistent with previous research using Weiner's attribution theory (Costa et al., 2014; Costa & Salinas-Quiroz, 2019; Frias-Navarro et al., 2015). According to this theoretical framework, people tend to judge others when they perceive their characteristics or behaviors are under their control. It is possible that participants who believe that homosexuality is a learned characteristic, especially those who are older and religious, also think that homosexuality is something that can be unlearned or changed if there is enough willpower. Thinking that homosexuality is something learned may also prevent people from agreeing with same-sex couples acquiring certain rights such as marriage and adoption (Costa, Pereira, & Leal, 2019). These people likely fear and reject the idea of children becoming gay if they have lesbian or gay parents.

It is noteworthy mentioning that our results did not support our hypothesis regarding education level. Initially, we thought that higher levels of education would mean higher levels of support toward lesbians, gay men, and their rights. However, our findings indicate that the less-educated participants were more supportive toward lesbians and gay men. We are not sure why we obtained these results. The literature suggests that higher levels of education usually mean more access to information that allows people to reason and question culturally-taught ideas about issues such as homosexuality. However, if people are educated in a conservative context by teachers with limited access to information and negative attitudes, individuals with high levels of education will probably become more prejudiced. It would be interesting if researchers analyze these relationships in further detail.

Implications

Several implications could be drawn from our results. First, this study suggests a series of characteristics and variables associated with levels of prejudice against populations that have been persecuted and discriminated against for decades. Identifying these characteristics and variables may help researchers and practitioners select potential targets of future interventions. Based on our results, intervening on the etiological beliefs of sexual orientation is a promising way through which it is possible to achieve attitudinal changes over time.

Achieving these objectives may require work from different agents such as the educational system and mass media. Issues associated with lesbian and gay populations should be explicitly discussed and visible at all education levels to

inform and question unfounded and uninformed beliefs about lesbians, gay men, and their rights, including those regarding their etiology. Mass media should also participate in portraying lesbian and gay individuals and relationships positively and affirmatively. It is possible that offering information, increasing visibility, and creating a level of closeness, comfort in contact, and respect may help reduce prejudice against lesbians, gay, and other sexual and gender minority populations.

Limitations and future studies

There are some limitations to this study. The data used for this paper came from an online survey distributed on social media, limiting access to areas of the country where there is an internet connection. Ecuador is a pluricultural and highly diverse country (Ayala Mora, 2002), and this recruitment method certainly did not allow us to obtain a representative sample of the Ecuadorian society. Future studies could attempt using sampling methods that ensure the representation of diverse groups such as afro-Ecuadorians and indigenous populations and participants from cities in all of Ecuador's regions (e.g., Guayaquil, Cuenca, Esmeraldas, Loja, Galápagos). Future initiatives should also include questions about ethnicity, the city of residence, and recruitment sites (e.g., in-person, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp).

Another limitation is that we asked participants' attitudes toward lesbians and gay men and not the attitudes toward different sexual and gender minority populations such as bisexuals, transgender people, intersexuals, and other queer communities. As far as we are concerned, there is no published information about attitudes toward these populations and it would of great use to obtain such data considering the high levels of discrimination that some of these populations experience.

One final limitation was the use of self-reported measures. In this study, we used instruments that might be susceptible to social desirability effects and personal biases. Future studies could contrast the results obtained in this study using objective procedures such as implicit measures (Lemm, 2006).

Conclusions

Studying attitudes toward lesbians, gay men, and their rights can help gather some data that might allow people to de-construct prejudiced views against sexual and gender minority populations. We hope this research helps to fill a void of information in a context where empirical data is still scarce. We believe this study has provided valuable information to design interventions to create safe, respectful, affirming environments and reduce stigma, discrimination, and violence.

Note

1. We recognize the importance of studying attitudes toward bisexual, transgender, intersexual, and other sexual and gender minority populations. However, we acknowledge that researching attitudes toward these populations requires a sensitive and detailed approach attuned to the complexities and particular aspects of these populations (e.g., beliefs about the nature of bisexuality, beliefs about gender identity, and transitioning processes). Due to the lack of research on attitudes toward sexual minorities in the country, we decided to limit our study to attitudes toward lesbians and gay populations.

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